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The Cajunization of French Louisiana: forging a regional identity

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French Louisiana is the only remnant of France's vast Mississippi Valley empire and its only effectively settled region in the eighteenth century. It remains today one of the most distinctive culture regions of the United States. However, perception of French Louisiana does not reflect its reality. The French population of Louisiana is very diversified in terms of its origins. Despite this diversity, French Louisiana is now usually associated exclusively with Cajuns, a word which until recently was considered derogatory. The beautification of the Cajun identity began to take place in the late 1960s. It was followed by a gradual Cajunization of the white French Louisiana identities and of the regional ethnic territory. However, this process of Cajunization remains incomplete because black Creoles and French-speaking Indians remain unintegrated. Hence, the apparent ethnic homogeneity of French Louisiana, viewed from the outside, contrasts sharply with the cultural variety of its communities.

KEY WORDS: French Louisiana, Cajun, Creole, culture region, identity.

SOUTHERN LOUISIANA IS the only effective remnant of the French presence in the Mississippi River Valley during the eighteenth century. Despite political Americanization in the early nineteenth century, rural French Louisiana continued to grow as a distinctively French region. The 1980 US Census evaluates the population of Louisiana having some French ancestry as almost one million (954237). What this number hides, however, is the diversity of origins of the French population. Louisiana has at least four major French subcultures.

The first group is the white Creoles. It includes descendants of the first French and French Canadian colonists, early gallicized Germans, and later political French refugees. Second are the black Creoles, some of whose ancestors came from Africa directly, others via the Caribbean. Some black Creoles had been free before the Civil War, and indeed occupied a special place in Louisiana society (see Mills [1977]; Woods [1972]). The third group is comprised of French-speaking Indians, especially the Houmas concentrated in the south-eastern parishes. Fourth are the descendants of the Acadians. The Acadians were deported in 1755 from their homeland, present-day Nova Scotia, by the English. After their arrival in Louisiana, they integrated into their culture people of such diverse ethnic origins as

Italian, Spanish, German and Scots-Irish. This fourth group has been popularly referred to as 'Cajun'.

For many, however, the existence of different French subcultures in Louisiana is an old story that belongs more to the past than the present. This assumption is supported by the belief that there are more Acadian descendants than any other French subgroup in French Louisiana, that there has been much intermarriage between the subcultures, and that currently the 'Cajun culture' has the most influence and surely the greatest visibility inside as well as outside the culture area. Inasmuch as the Louisiana French are coming to national and international attention under the 'Cajun' label, the role and influence of the other French subcultures in defining the character of the region are simply overlooked.

In fact, the French subcultures are important in the geography of today's French Louisiana. This being so, three questions need to be answered: Why is French Louisiana revealing itself under the 'Cajun' label, which not so long ago was derogatory? How have the recent changes in the image of the culture region affected the way people react to the word Cajun in French Louisiana, and what are the consequences? What is the role and influence of the French subcultures in the geography of the region?

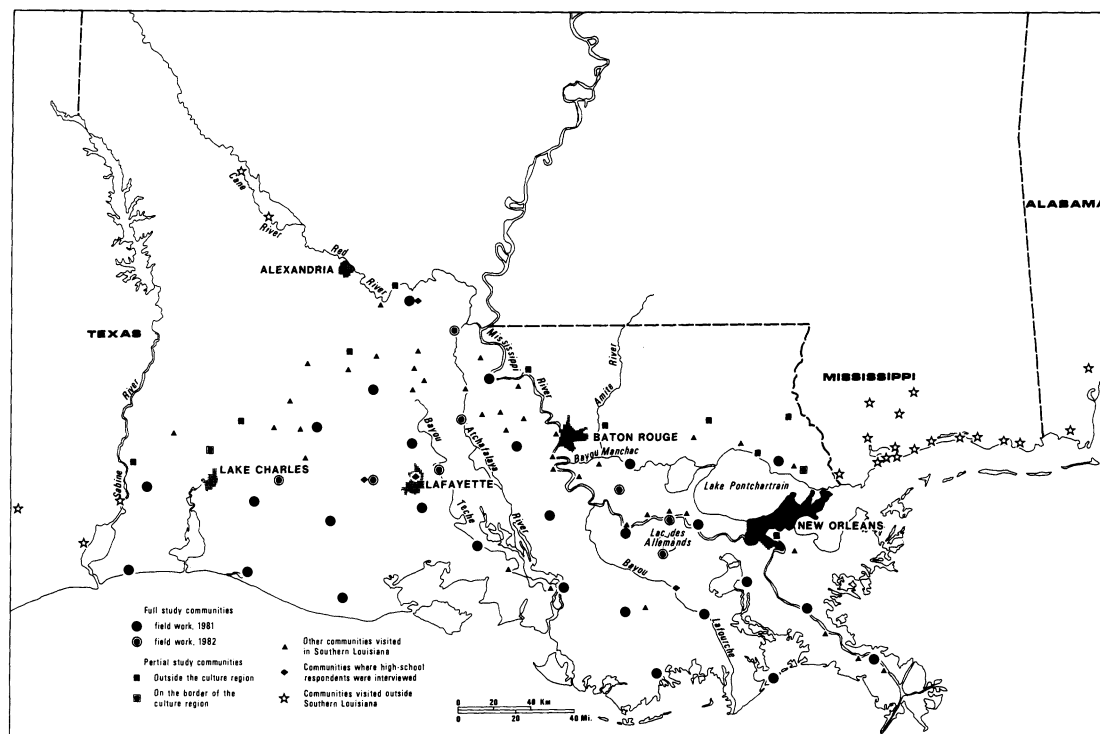


Fig. 1. Communities visited in fieldwork, 1981 and 1982

Answers to these questions were found through extensive fieldwork in Southern Louisiana and surrounding areas where more than 200 interviews with residents were conducted. Main study communities (big dots on Fig. 1) were selected from a map overlaid with a 48-by-48 kilometre grid. In each one the postmaster, the priest, a Protestant minister when possible, and three senior respondents (usually identified by postmaster or priest) were formally interviewed. Twenty-one interviews were conducted with high-school respondents in four selected communities. Many other communities within or near the limits of their culture region were visited briefly, either to verify their ethnic character or to determine the culture region's boundary.

The need for a regional identity

In the 1960s a surge of revival swept ethnic communities everywhere. Even advanced industrial states were touched. In the United States, the most oppressed of minorities was obtaining a voice, recognition, and assurance of legal rights through the Black Power and Civil Rights Movements. Other groups also benefited from the new mood of the country. Starting as early as 1958, the US Government began legislative steps to allow education in languages other than English.

Sensitive to the new cultural and political developments in the country and abroad, Louisiana Governor John MacKeithen, although anglophone, sensed the particularity of his state and the political benefits to be reaped from a French image. He not only emphasized the importance of the French language for Louisiana, but encouraged the state legislature to adopt measures aimed at preserving it (Smith-Thibodaux, 1977: 71-2). Hence, in 1968, the state legislature created CODOFIL, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana, an organization empowered to do just that. In the opinion of CODOFIL's energetic and pragmatic president, Mr James Domengeaux, French Louisiana could become the French window of the United States on the world. However, CODOFIL faced a major problem. Despite support from the US Government and many state agencies, it enjoyed essentially no popular base. To create such a base was not an easy task.

Not only was French Louisiana ethnically diversified, but compartmentalized geographically. The different groups occupied specific areas. Hence some subregions were 'Acadian', while others were 'Creole'. People of the same group also occupied very different natural environments (Comeaux, 1978). Acadian penetration characterized the east-

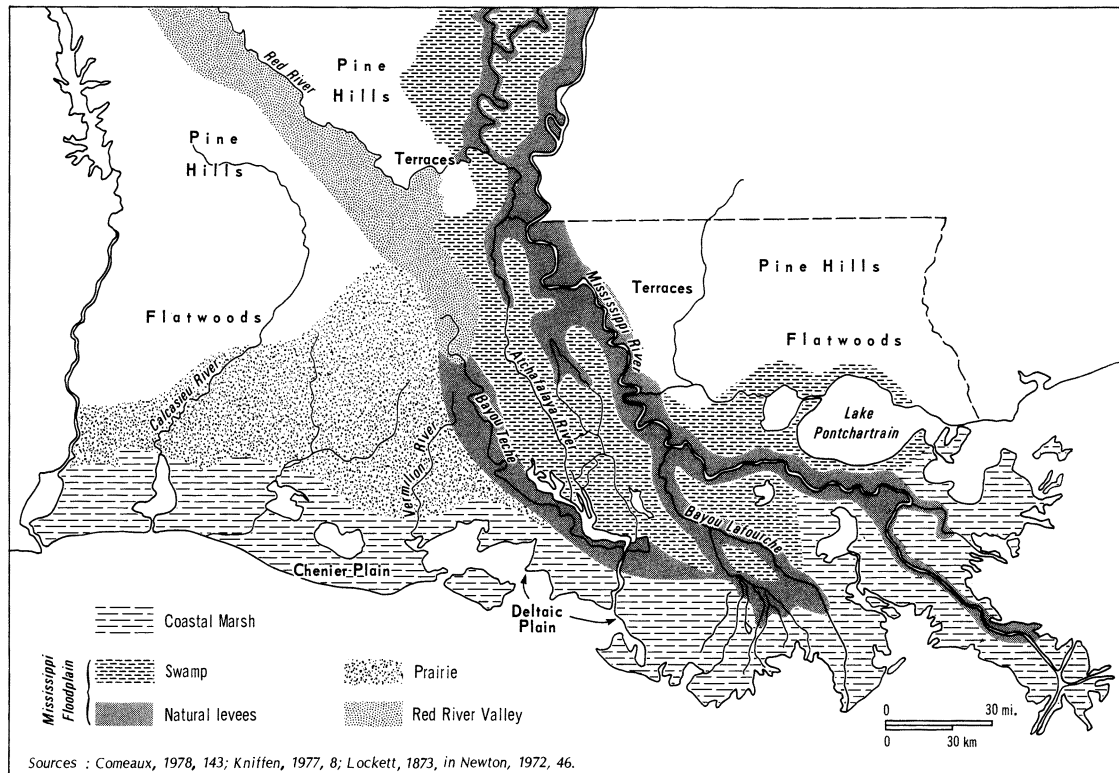


Fig. 2. The natural environments of Southern Louisiana

ern bayous, the coastal marshes, and the southwestern prairies (Fig. 2). Occasionally, more than one group could be found within the same area. For instance, an Anglo-American presence was important along the Mississippi River and the western prairies and Gulf Coast; blacks were concentrated on the eastern prairies and in the Mississippi River parishes, while French-speaking Indians occupied the south-eastern ones. This geographical complexity was reinforced by social differentiation based on class. Given these circumstances, a viable, Louisiana-wide French ethnic consciousness has always been difficult to achieve. To reach its goal, CODOFIL is trying to create such a regional consciousness in, among other things, defining a regional identity.

Historical background on Creole and Cajun identities

Only academics use the expression 'the Louisiana French' to speak about the French Louisiana population. Despite the generality of the expression, one is never quite sure of its effective inclusiveness. The words Creole and Cajun, on the other hand, refer to traditional identities in the region. Each has its roots in the past.

The Creole identity The Creole identity had emerged in Louisiana at the end of the eighteenth century with the arrival of refugees from Saint-Domingue. There the word 'Creole' was more widely used than in Louisiana (Dominguez, 1977: 592). In fact, the word 'Creole' comes from the Spanish, and had not been known in Louisiana during the French period (until 1763) (Asbury, 1938: 92). For the Spaniards, the children born of Spanish parents in a colony were *Criollas* (Saucier, 1943: 106). The French of the West Indies simply borrowed it to fit their own reality. In Louisiana, then, strictly speaking, the Creoles were descendants from the colonists who came directly from France and Spain before the Louisiana Purchase, and of the Creoles from the West Indies (St Martin, 1937: 859). According to Asbury (1938: 92) it also meant 'native'. Thus any native of Louisiana was a Creole. After the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, the Creoles added to the definition a cultural dimension to exclude the American newcomers. To be Creole one needed to be native and French in culture (Dominguez, 1977: 592-3).

Beginning in the late 1880s a new problem arose as a wave of Jim Crow laws swept the South. Lynching and the institutionalization of segregation

advanced. Until then, neither the traditional definition of Creole (native) nor the modified one (cultural) had ever required purity of racial ancestry (Dominguez, 1977: 593). To the Americans, this indifference became suspicious and comments suggested that the Creoles' inattention to purity of ancestry indicated that most of them, if not all, were in fact 'tainted' by the 'touch of the tarbrush' (Dominguez, 1977: 594). Indeed, the American system of ethnic classification had no place for a racially undifferentiated social category. If the Creoles insisted on their inclusive categorization, they would be classified within the 'colored' section of society. As a last resort, the white Creoles began to systematically exclude 'coloured Creoles' from their group (Dominguez, 1977: 594). For them 'Creole' became strictly a white ethnic category. However, blacks with a French culture never recognized this new definition and members of both groups continue to refer to themselves as Creoles.

The Cajun identity The word Cajun is probably a corruption of the word *Acadien*. Two hypotheses illuminate the circumstances of its origin. One suggests that the aristocratic, well-educated, financially well-off Creoles, city folk and plantation princes, looked down upon the newcomers from Acadia who, on the whole, were a rural people. St Martin, for instance, reported that 'A Creole mother would say to her child, "*Tu es habillé comme un Cadien; ça c'est Cadien*" and that made her point. It seems reasonable,' he continued, 'to suppose that the corruption of Cadien to Cajun came about in that way, as a slur of reproach to the unworthy ones in their midst by the Creoles themselves' (1937: 861). According to the second hypothesis, English-speaking settlers named the people Cajuns because they could not pronounce the French word *Acadien* or *Cadien* (St Martin, 1937: 861).

Whatever its origin, Cajun became a 'fighting word' (St Martin) and corresponded to the term 'hill-billy' in other sections of the United States (Saucier, 1943: 102). For instance, the 'old Negro mammy did not say "poor white trash". She said: "Cajun"' (St Martin, 1937: 861). Also, an ignorant or poor person, even though Creole in origin, might be called a Cajun, while a prosperous or educated Acadian would be called a Creole (Saucier, 1943: 102).

Given these circumstances, one may wonder how the Acadians came to accept the Cajun identity. A geographer, E. Waddell, has suggested an answer with roots in the racial dilemma of French Louisiana. With the end of slavery many black Creoles became sharecroppers and small farmers, activities characteristic of the Cajun world. A merging of economic interests occurred between the two groups, and in Waddell's words, 'a blurring of racial

boundaries' as well. When the Anglo-Americans began to stress that Creole indicated mixed racial origins, a new racial order based on black-white duality was imposed in Louisiana, as Dominguez has shown. In Waddell's opinion,

The rural whites were left with no alternative at this point but to assume their stigmatized identity, as Cajuns, because at least it implied a certain 'purity of race'. According to this new term non-white francophones could be, or were often, *like* Cajuns but they could never *be* Cajuns.

(Waddell, 1979: 6).

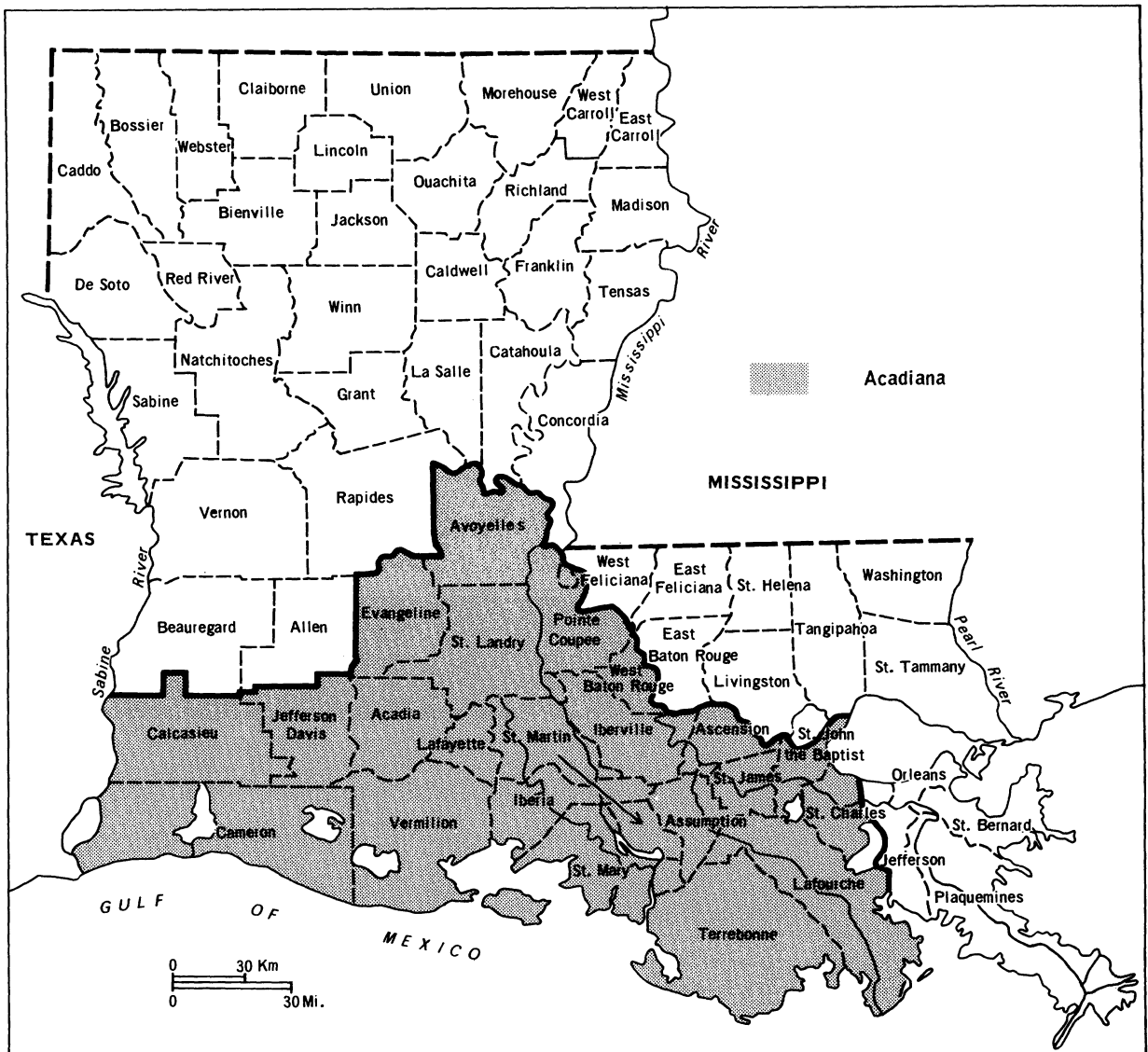
Hence, an inferior group identity was imposed on a large part of the rural white component of the French Louisiana population. Nevertheless, until the 1970s, it was not wise for non-Cajuns to call somebody a Cajun to his or her face.

The Cajunization of the French Louisiana identity

Despite the fact that the Creole identity had always carried a positive image for white and black francophones of Southern Louisiana, it is under the Cajun label that CODOFIL proceeded to unify the region. This choice can only be interpreted as the desire for the French Louisiana elite to assure for the region a 'white' identity. This choice made, the Cajunization of French Louisiana had to begin by the beautification of the word Cajun.

In its efforts to make the Cajun identity respectable, CODOFIL stressed the original genealogical definition of Cajun, that is, its Acadian character. The word Acadian became a synonym for Cajun, and was used as such. 'Acadian' and 'Acadia' sprang up all over the landscape in the names of businesses and festivals. The phenomenon was especially strong around Lafayette. In fact, 'Acadia' finds a place on Zelinsky's 1980 map of vernacular regions of the United States. Furthermore, in 1971, the state legislature chose the name 'Acadiana' to designate the culture area of Southern Louisiana (Fig. 3). The flag that was going to fly over it was the 'Louisiana Acadian Flag'. This definition made awkward the place of Italian, Spanish, German, Scots-Irish 'Cajuns' by referring to an old Acadian identity, and definitely prevented blacks and Indians of French culture from being Cajuns (Waddell, 1979: 11-12).

However, the term 'Cajun' itself became legitimate when the flashy and charismatic Edwin Edwards was elected governor. Edwards ran under the Cajun label. He enlarged its definition by addressing it not only to those of Acadian descent, but rather to everyone having a French culture or a French heritage in Louisiana. Soon after, the new mood was engraved in the landscape as Cajun, sometimes spelled in original ways (Kajun, Ka-



Source: State of Louisiana, Concurrent Resolution Number 496, 1971

Fig. 3. Acadiana: Official French Louisiana, 1971

Jon), appeared on every possible sign. As stickers of all sizes announced, it was the time for 'Cajun Power' and, of course, Cajun festivals.

Outside Louisiana, the fact that the word Cajun is immediately associated with the people of French Louisiana and interpreted to mean simply Acadian demonstrates the effectiveness of CODOFIL in promoting its message on the national and international scene. Within Louisiana, CODOFIL's and Edwards' propaganda conjointly redefined the Cajun identity. For my respondents, a Cajun was

no longer rural, backward, uneducated. He or she could no longer be characterized by a single way of life or behaviour. Instead, Cajuns were, most of all, people who had some French roots (Table I).

A most striking feature to observe was how fast the perception of the Cajun identity has changed. The speed of the change could be appreciated through the comparison of the results from this research with those of the 'Projet Louisiane' (Table II), obtained three years earlier (1977–1979) in two towns of Southern Louisiana: Lafayette, home of

TABLE I
 'What is a Cajun?'
 Respondents of 35 French Louisiana communities, 1981-1982

Definition	PM		GM		P		M		SR		Total (b)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Genealogical	21	75	4	47	33	79	16	73	79	77	153	79
Uniquely genealogical	12	43	2	29	6	18	1	5	37	36	59	30
Not uniquely genealogical	9	32	2	29	27	79	15	68	42	41	94	49
Some Acadian origin	11	39	1	14	25	74	5	23	40	39	82	42
Some French origin	10	36	2	29	5	15	10	45	28	27	55	28
Other origin	—	—	1	14	3	9	1	5	11	11	16	8
Behavioural	12	43	3	43	18	53	17	77	39	38	89	46
Uniquely language	2	7	—	—	—	—	1	5	10	10	13	7
Not uniquely language	2	7	3	43	3	9	4	18	20	19	32	16
Uniquely other behaviour	3	11	—	—	1	3	3	14	1	1	8	4
Not uniquely other behaviour	7	25	—	—	16	47	12	55	11	11	46	24
Territorial	6	21	3	43	14	41	7	32	34	33	64	33
Uniquely territorial	1	4	1	14	—	—	—	—	3	3	5	3
Not uniquely territorial	5	18	2	29	14	41	7	32	31	30	59	30
Louisiana	—	—	—	—	6	18	1	5	9	9	16	8
Southern Louisiana	1	4	2	29	4	12	4	18	5	5	16	8
Specific places	1	4	—	—	1	3	—	—	1	1	3	2
In the country	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	2	1
On the bayous	—	—	1	14	1	3	1	5	5	5	8	4
Here	4	14	—	—	2	6	1	5	12	12	19	10
Derogatory (c)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10	10	10	5
Hesitation	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	2	1
Total of respondents	28		7		34		22		103		194	

Notes:

(a) N, number; PM, postmaster; GM, grocery manager; P, priest; M, minister; and SR, senior respondent.

(b) The subtotals do not necessarily add up since a respondent can give many elements in his or her answer.

(c) A Cajun was characterized as a stupid person, a country person, poor, low class, or a person who speaks 'bad French'. The word 'coonnass' is not included.

CODOFIL, located at the centre of the culture region, and Westwego, on its eastern edge, on New Orleans' Westbank.

In 1981, when respondents were asked 'What is a Cajun?', the 'I don't know' answers, hesitation and derogatory definitions of Cajuns had vanished. In 1978, 11 per cent of the respondents gave a derogatory definition of Cajun (3 per cent, Lafayette; 22 per cent Westwego) and 19 per cent did not give an answer or hesitated before risking one (13 per cent, Lafayette; 22 per cent Westwego). Also, while genealogical definitions of Cajuns were overwhelming in 1981 (79 per cent), they were much less important in 1978 (37 per cent). In other words, a Cajun in 1978 was defined much more by a way of either being or a way of life than by where he came from. Here are some examples:

J'te garantis nous-autres on est des Cadjins. J'calcule qu'on est pas mieux que d'autre monde mais aussi bon que d'autres tu sais. Ya plein du monde...qui croit des fois parce que tu parles français, t'as pas d'éducation, t'es plus bas que les autres... Mais moi j'ai tout le temps dit, moi j'peux parler français et toi tu peux pas, ça fait j'pas si bête que toi, j'peux parler deux langues. Tu comprends ça j'veux dire?

I guarantee you that we are Cajuns. I think that we are not better than other people but as good as the others you know. There are a lot of people...who believe that because you speak French, you don't have education, you are worth less than the others...But me, I have always said, I can speak French and you can't, so I'm not as stupid as you, I can speak two languages. You understand what I'm saying?

(Male respondent, Westwego, 1978)

or,

Un Cadjin il aime travailler dur, il soigne sa famille bien, il aime s'amuser et bien manger.

A Cajun likes to work hard, to take good care of his family, he likes to have a good time and eat well.

(Female respondent, Lafayette, 1978)

or

...un Cadjin c'est moi. J'suis un Cadjin et j'suis proud de ça. Un Cadjin moi j'trouve c'est une personne qu'a un bon coeur, qu'a du sentiment pour les autres...et aime faire quelque chose pour qu'qu'un d'autre...Le Cadjin c'est close du monde qui vient Nova Scotia, Quebec, qu'a tout venu ici pour faire une vie. C'est là où le Cadjin est venu, mais la manière moi j'le vois...un bon coeur, proud, du monde qui travaille dur...

TABLE II
 'What is a Cajun?'
 Westwego and Lafayette respondents, 1978

Definition	Westwego		Lafayette		Total (a)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Genealogical	18	37	1	37	29	37
Uniquely genealogical	13	27	9	30	22	28
Not uniquely genealogical	5	11	2	7	7	9
Some Acadian origin	8	16	8	27	16	20
Some French origin	8	16	3	10	11	14
Other origin	2	4	—	—	2	3
Behavioural	28	57	16	53	44	56
Uniquely language	11	22	5	17	16	20
Not uniquely language	7	14	6	20	13	16
Uniquely other behaviour	5	10	4	13	9	11
Not uniquely other behaviour	7	14	3	10	10	13
Territorial	9	18	8	27	17	22
Uniquely territorial	1	2	1	3	2	3
Not uniquely territorial	8	16	7	23	15	19
Louisiana	1	2	2	7	3	4
Southern Louisiana	1	2	1	3	2	3
In the country	4	8	—	—	4	5
On the bayous	2	4	—	—	2	3
Here	1	2	5	17	6	8
Derogatory (b)	8	16	1	3	9	11
Does not know or hesitation	11	22	4	13	15	19
Does not know	5	10	1	3	6	8
Hesitation	6	12	3	10	9	11
Total of respondents	49		30		79	

Notes:

(a) The subtotals do not necessarily add up, since the respondent could give many elements in his or her answer.

(b) A Cajun was characterized as a stupid, ignorant person or a country person. The word 'coonass', casually mentioned by six respondents, is not included.

...a Cajun, that's me. I'm a Cajun and I'm proud of it. A Cajun, I think, is a person who has a good heart, who has consideration for others...and likes to do something for somebody else... The Cajun is sort of people who came from Nova Scotia, Quebec, who came here to make a life for themselves. That's where the Cajuns come from, but the way I see it...a good heart, proud, people who work hard...

(Male respondent, Westwego, 1978)

In 1981, the spontaneity one felt in the answers of the 1978 respondents had evaporated. Instead it sounded as if everybody had learned the same lesson: '*Nous autres on s'appelle des Cadjins. On est supposé être des Acadiens.*' (We call ourselves Cajuns. We are supposed to be Acadians) (Female senior respondent, Basile, 1982); or 'A name for the French people here' (Male senior respondent, French Settlement, 1981).

The new status of 'Cajun' made a real change in French Louisiana. In the past, a Cajun would have been glad to be called a Creole because of the higher status associated with the word, while a Creole would have resented being called Cajun. In fact, some respondents were not too happy about the change: '*On s'appelait des Créoles avant cette affaire de Cadjin*' (We were called Creoles before this Cajun business) (Female senior respondent, Breaux

Bridge); or '*Ils s'appellent des Cadjins mais c'est tous des Créoles*' (They call themselves Cajuns but they're all Creoles) (Female senior respondent, Edgar). These remarks indicate, however, that the word Cajun was, indeed, in the process of becoming more inclusive. Twelve per cent of all respondents directly expressed this metamorphosis of the word Cajun in their definitions. Hence, two types of Cajun came to be recognized: the 'real' or 'pure' Cajun, of Acadian descent, and the 'new' Cajun, that is any white Louisiana native of French culture.

However, ethnic mobilization is not complete in French Louisiana; it splits along racial lines. It is successful in gradually unifying the white French subcultures of the area, but it fails because both blacks and Indians of French culture persist in defining a Cajun as a white person. This conclusion is supported by the work of Maguire (1987), Larouche (1979) and Bernier (1978). Blacks readily identify with a Creole identity, whereas Indians assume their Indian identity in their communities of origin, but can easily pass for Cajun outside it and be recognized as such.

Despite the racial gap, the process of Cajunization is important in French Louisiana because it has an undeniable impact on the geographical unification

of the culture region. To put it plainly, the process of Cajunization which has been operating at the personal level has also a spatial counterpart. As a result, the geographic definition of what 'Cajun Country' is supposed to be has also been changing.

The Cajunization of the French Louisiana territory

Traditionally, 'Cajun country' has been associated with the south-western part of French Louisiana. The Atchafalaya River was seen as the border between Cajuns and the 'other' French. To this day the idea persists in the minds of many people and some version of the image is usually promoted for tourists (Fig. 4 (a)).

Another popular image is that Cajun people are bayou people, and by extension, Bayou country is Cajun country. The idea, for instance, is conveyed by Carolyn Ramsey's book *Cajuns on the Bayous* (1957), in which the end leaf map shows us 'M'sieu André's Cajun Country' (Fig. 4 (b)). This regionalization recurs among the 'other' French, especially along the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, and among 'Cajuns' in some south-eastern bayou communities.

The endurance of both images ignores the results of Peveril Meigs' 1941 study. He was the first researcher to try systematically and geographically to define the domain of different French subcultures in Louisiana by mapping the distribution of Acadian and Creole surnames. Although the method is far from perfect, ignoring as it does the many acculturated nationalities in the different subcultures, the result is very instructive. Meigs showed that the Atchafalaya River was not the border between Acadians and the 'other' French and that all bayou country was not dominated by Acadians (Fig. 4 (c)). Unfortunately a more recent study ties the French names to areas of origin (West, 1986), but fails to show the spatial distribution of surnames by group.

As mentioned earlier, in 1971, an official French Louisiana defined by the Louisiana legislature was called 'Acadiana' and included almost all of Southern Louisiana (Fig. 3). Soon after, Acadiana was referred to as 'the 22 parishes of the Cajuns' country' (*Institut des études françaises*, 1979). Books on Cajuns, also published in the 1970s, confuse Cajun territory with 'Acadiana' or the 'French Triangle', in other words, all of French Louisiana (Conrad, 1978; Rushton, 1979). Gradually then, through the 1970s, Acadiana, Cajun Country, and French Louisiana became synonymous. It is clear that these changes impose a Cajun identity on all French Louisiana, making the territory fit the new Cajun definition.

The image of French Louisiana as the Cajun Country is accepted well by the people. The Cajun label is generally accepted as describing even those

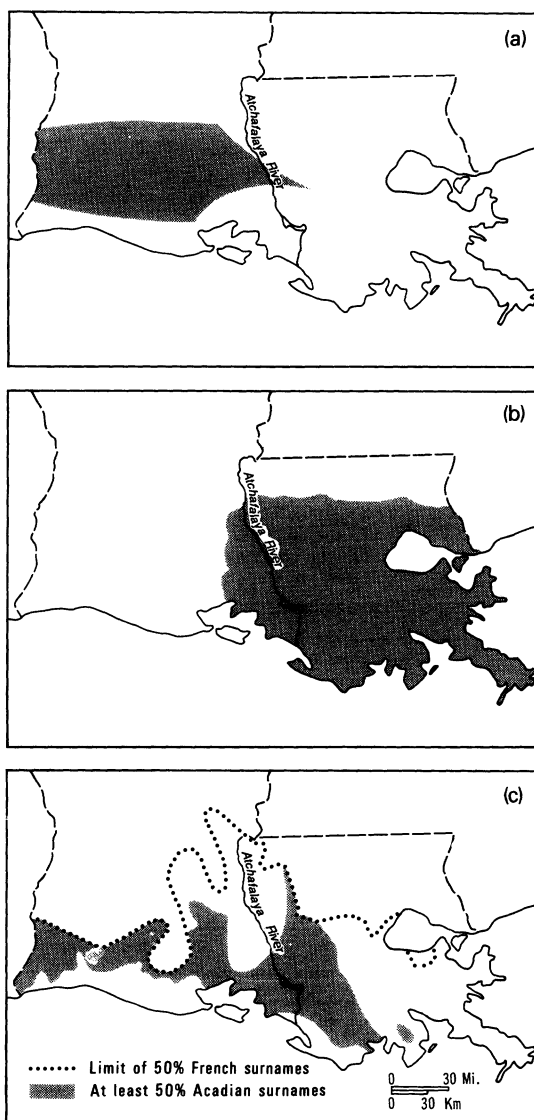


Fig. 4. In search of 'Cajun Country': (a) 'Cajun Country' for tourists; (b) 'Bayou Country'; (c) defined by Acadian surnames, 1939

Sources: Louisiana Travel Promotion Association and the Louisiana Office of Tourism, 1984; Ramsey, 1957 endleaf after Meigs, 1941.

communities with little Acadian ancestry (Fig. 5 (a) and (b)). However, while recent Cajunization has allowed a large part of French Louisiana territory to identify itself as Cajun, the acceptance of that identity is not necessarily a recent phenomenon in all areas dominated by non-Acadians. In the eastern prairies and the south-eastern bayous, the acceptance of a Cajun identity is likely to have

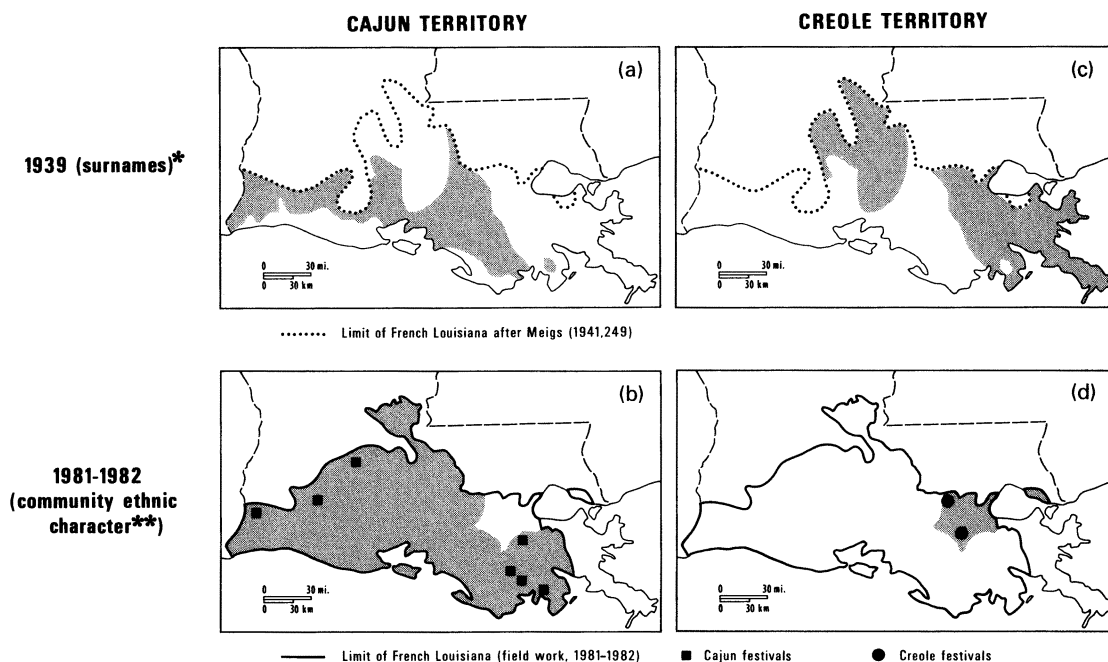


Fig. 5. *The Cajunization of French Louisiana*

* According to Meigs, the coast of south-western Louisiana and of Terrebonne Parish was not Acadian-dominated. However, this area is not shown as Creole-dominated because Meigs did neither a telephone directory analysis nor a mailbox survey there.

** Evaluated from respondents of 35 French Louisiana communities, festivals from Louisiana Office of Tourism (1981, 1982) and fieldwork.

happened earlier than in the Avoyelles Parish (the northernmost parish of French Louisiana) and many Mississippi River communities, where it is a phenomenon of the late 1970s.

The role and influence of the French subcultures

Given the geographical extent of the Cajun identity in present-day French Louisiana, one may wonder about the roles and relative influence of the different French subcultures in the geography of the region. French Louisiana may be evaluated differently depending upon how high an observer is flying. At low altitude (community level) the role and influence of the French subcultures are fundamental. At medium altitude (subregional level) they are significant. At high altitude (regional level) they are negligible, thanks to Cajun ascendancy at a time when national cultural pressure could not be stronger. In other words, the farther one stands from the reality and intricacy of community living, the easier it is to see French Louisiana as a cultural monolith. Yet the influence of the different subcultures manifests itself in several important ways.

French-speaking Indians in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parishes and the black Creoles, concentrated

along the Mississippi River and the eastern prairie parishes (west of the Atchafalaya basin), are estimated to represent at least 15 per cent (of which black Creoles make up 14 per cent) of the Louisiana French population. This estimation was derived from the 1970 US Census figures. They may be the most faithful bearers of the French culture, although not necessarily by choice; in North America, traditional cultures have often survived more through discrimination than ethnic will. But the proximity of the subcultures to each other is shown by the ease with which a French-speaking Indian may become a Cajun by moving out of his or her locality. The black Creole, although shut out from the Cajun identity, shares nevertheless some elements of that culture (French language, food, religion). Furthermore, the contribution of black Creoles to the French Louisiana culture (for example, Creole language, Zydeco music, and elements of the cuisine) helps to distinguish it from the northern Acadian culture of Canada while bringing it closer to the Caribbean French world.

The presence of a zone of resistance to the Cajun identity also indicates the importance of the subcultures in the geography of the region (Fig. 5

(d)). This zone includes an area of the Mississippi River between Baton Rouge and New Orleans, and stretches northwards to the Amite River and Lake Pontchartrain. While the Cajun festival is becoming the festival of choice in many communities elsewhere in Southern Louisiana, in this zone of resistance, ethnic identity under the Creole label is celebrated.

However, even here in a Creole stronghold the Cajun festival is infiltrating (Hahnville), and a double pattern of ethnic affiliation exists in certain situations. In some cases, even though people know that they are Creole and identify themselves as such within their communities, when they are outside them, or with 'Americans' and are asked if they are Cajuns, they will say 'yes' and accept the Cajun identity. Another such situation occurs when in a mixed-race Creole community, black people insist on promoting their Creole identity. In one particular community, for example, blacks and whites alike call themselves Creoles and identify their community as such. However, when the blacks organized a softball team and called it 'The Creoles', the whites' softball team was baptized 'The Cajuns'.

It is also noteworthy that in the zone of resistance to Cajun identity, as well as where the acceptance of the Cajun identity is recent, the people are not culturally more Cajun than they were before. In these areas, even people who accept the designation 'Cajun' insist on cultural differences between themselves and the 'real' Cajuns. These differences are expressed in the type of French spoken, food, the absence of any typical Cajun music in their area, or

even community atmosphere. As a youngster in Marksville, in Avoyelles Parish points out: 'Marksville is French but a Cajun community has more fun'. These differences, as subtle as they may seem to some, influence the character of places. They are reinforced by the persistence of a rooted sense of 'us versus them'. This in turn is reflected in the way people continue to refer to one another as members of separate groups in the different sections of the culture region.

Finally, the persistence of traditional ethnic allegiances is not inconsequential. These allegiances make a significant difference, especially at the community level, where in the intricacy of social relations that characterize everyday life, the fact of being Cajun, white Creole, black Creole, or French-speaking Indian dictates relations between people.

Conclusion

Ethnically, French Louisiana is a complicated place and always has been. While the expression 'French Louisiana' sins by omission in hiding the diversity of the population in both origin and experience, 'Acadiana' and 'Cajun Country' err even more by assigning all ethnicity to one of the groups. Ethnic mobilization, more than ever the key to ethnic survival in an indifferent America, remains incomplete in French Louisiana because black Creoles and French-speaking Indians remain unintegrated. Some of the groups which have made French Louisiana unique in North America do not yet have a home in Cajun Country.

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